

Coins

Collector may be a mystery, but his fortune isn't

By Roger Boye

WHEN A CALIFORNIA "mystery collector" purchased an extremely rare 1913 Liberty nickel for \$200,000 last summer, he reportedly told his friends, "This is only a start."

Obviously, the man wasn't kidding. A few weeks ago he bought an 1804 silver dollar—one of the most famous American coin treasures—for another \$200,000.

The mystery man, believed by some observers to be a prominent television personality, apparently wants to acquire every great United

States numismatic rarity. He already owns a valuable stamp collection.

Ironically, the 1804 dollar has a history that is almost as mysterious as the collector's identity. Although mint records indicate that 19,570 dollars were produced in 1804, experts believe they were all dated 1803.

Mint employees supposedly struck eight 1804 dollars in 1834 or 1835 at the request of the Secretary of State who wanted to present two complete sets of the nation's coinage to foreign dignitaries. In about 1858, coin scholars theorize, seven more 1804 dollars were produced at the

mint to satisfy collector demand.

The recent sale, which involved one of the seven specimens minted in 1858, has prompted some hobbyists to ask, "Who is the mystery collector?" Numismatic News, a coin newspaper, says the man is Buddy Ebsen, star of the television show "Barnaby Jones."

"Not true," replied an attorney involved in the coin sale. "It so happens that the collector is a prominent sports personality."

Whatever his identity, the man is well on the way to assembling one of the country's finest coin collections. He already has refused an offer

of \$350,000 for his 1913 nickel, reported Coin World, another hobby newspaper.

THE BUREAU OF the Mint has earned good marks for its coin products and service, according to the results of a nationwide survey of mint customers.

About 4 of every 5 persons queried rated the mint's coin sets as "excellent" or "above average," and a surprising 93 per cent said they were satisfied with the service when placing an order.